

OPENING STATEMENT
AGING COMMITTEE HEARING
Long Term Care for the 21st Century:
A Common Sense Proposal to Support Family Caregivers
March 23, 1999

Thank you all for joining us today to learn more about a new initiative that could help millions of American families through the creation of the National Family Caregiver Support Program. I would like to especially thank Secretary Donna Shalala for appearing today to discuss the Administration's commitment to family caregivers and our nation's elders. It is an honor to have you with us, Madame Secretary. Your participation is a clear sign that the National Family Caregiver Support Program is a high priority not only within the Department of Health and Human Services, but within the White House. I would also like to welcome Assistant Secretary Jeannette Takamura, from the Administration on Aging and Dr. Richard Hodes, head of the National Institute on Aging. To all of you, your commitment to this issue is greatly appreciated by this Committee, and we certainly look forward to working closely with you on the establishment of this program.

I would also like to welcome the rest of our witnesses and thank them for their participation. Mr. and Mrs. Awbrey, you have shown tremendous courage in appearing today to speak about your personal battle with Alzheimer's Disease and the caregiving issues that you will face in the future. Representative Boyd, you also have demonstrated great strength in traveling to Washington to share your story. I would also like to welcome Richard Browdie, who is the Secretary on Aging for the state of Pennsylvania and Donna Harvey, who is the director of the Hawkeye Area Agency on Aging in Waterloo, Iowa. Thank you and welcome.

On January 4, 1999, President Clinton took the first step toward making life a little easier for family caregivers by announcing the creation of the National Family Caregiver Support Program as part of his long-term care initiative--the first new policy initiative that he announced in 1999. Today, Senator Grassley, Senator Dodd and I will take the next step towards reaching that goal. Later this afternoon, we will introduce legislation to establish this program under the auspices of the Older Americans Act. By doing this, we hope to acknowledge the contribution and sacrifice that American families make every day to adequately care for our nation's elders.

In my capacity as the Ranking Member of the Aging Committee and through my involvement with the National Family Caregivers Association, I have learned a great deal about family caregiving. Over twenty two million families in the United States provide care that has been valued at \$194 billion per year, and yet that care is truly priceless. Family caregivers pay on average \$2000 per year toward the care of their loved one, the equivalent of an annual IRA contribution. Many caregivers become isolated and depressed due to their constant efforts; more than 30% of caregivers experience physical or mental health problems as a result of caregiving. It is clear that we must do all we can to support these families.

Implicit in the creation of the National Family Caregiver Support Program is the need to reauthorize the Older Americans Act (OAA). The OAA has not been reauthorized since 1992. For three years, the issue has been tangled up in debates and differences of opinion. This year we must move forward to reauthorize and modernize the OAA. The creation the National Family Caregiver Support Program hinges on reauthorization; and as we will surely learn today through the testimony of our witnesses, this program will serve a crucial role in meeting the needs of our nation's families and enable our elders to receive the best and most loving care available.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman for your leadership on this issue. And again thank you to our witnesses, Secretary Shalala and others, for your participation and dedication.